

HEADQUARTERS

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—The story opens with a scene from Dorothy March, a charming debutante, in the opera box of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. It is occasioned by the fact that the diamond necklace breaking and scattering the string of rare and costly gems all over the floor. Curtis Griswold and Brutus Sands, two society men, both of whom love Mrs. Missioner, gather up some of the diamonds, but the rest of the collection, the celebrated Maharanees, is missing. Griswold steps on the apparent missing diamond and it crushes under his heel. A Hindu comes from an adjoining box, and picking up a flash of the crushed gem pronounces it a fraud, not the genuine Maharanees, but paste.

CHAPTER II.—The entire party proceeded to the elegant mansion of Mrs. Missioner, where she takes them to a room having a safe containing other diamonds. She afterwards sends for a Mr. Ransome, an expert, who pronounces the stones all copies, substitutions, of the original gems.

CHAPTER III.—Brutus Sands telephones police headquarters and two detectives, Donnelly and Carson, arrive on the scene. They examine the safe and decide that the theft of the original diamonds was accomplished by some one in the house. The servants are questioned, but without result. Then they learn that Miss Elinor Holcomb, the confidential companion of Mrs. Missioner, has a duplicate key to the safe and they send for her.

CHAPTER IV.—The detectives incline to the belief that Miss Holcomb is involved in the robbery. They search her room and find in a cabinet, wrapped in tissue paper, they find one of the original diamonds. Mrs. Missioner protests that Elinor is guiltless, but the detective girl is marched off to prison.

CHAPTER V.—Meantime, in an up-town mansion, the Hindu of the Maharanees, who is known as the Swami, and a Hindu prince, Kananda, discuss the arrest. They are in the United States to recover the Maharanees, which is a sacred relic of India, and are puzzled at the discovery of the imitation.

CHAPTER VI.—Detective Britz, an expert of the police force, now takes up the case. He interviews Elinor, who is portrayed by the cloud resting on her. The detective evidently believes the girl innocent.

CHAPTER VII.—Dr. Lawrence Fitch, the fiancé of Elinor, visits her in prison. She is remanded for trial on suspicion of being the thief. Detective Britz is sent to Fitch and asks his co-operation in running down the real criminal.

CHAPTER VIII.—The detective advises that Elinor does not believe in the safe having located the real culprit. He makes a close investigation of affairs at the home of Mrs. Missioner.

CHAPTER VIII.

Britz Takes Action.

Lieutenant Britz occupied a unique position in the Detective Bureau. His official grade was the same as that of Donnelly and Carson, but, by sheer force of his ability, he had lifted himself so far above them that when working on a case they accepted his orders like subordinates. Britz was one of the four or five men of the entire detective force who could not be classed as a "stool-pigeon man." That is, he did not depend on the use of stool-pigeons for his results. He needed no staff of thieves to inform him of the doings of other thieves. His detective ability was developed to a high degree, combining an acute analytic sense with remarkable industry. These talents were reinforced by a rare detective instinct, which often led him irresistibly to the goal of his pursuit.

He was a bundle of twitching nerves beneath a placid exterior. Nature had endowed him with an inscrutable countenance, an iron will, and a restless energy that seemed to flow from an inexhaustible inner fountain. He matched his resourcefulness against the tricks of the criminals he pursued and, having the keener mind, he invariably won.

Britz's enthusiasm never bubbled to the surface. He carried himself with an appearance of mastery ease, as if he held his impulses in complete subjection. There was nothing striking in his stature, yet he left an impression of hidden strength as of a steel framework behind a light coating of plaster. His eyes, deep set beneath the arched outline of his eyebrows, seemed to emit a mysterious, inexplicable current that circled around one and drew one closer within its constantly narrowing circumference. The shade of melancholy that gloomed his nature was not hidden by the mask of superb indifference that rested on his well-defined features, with their crowning breadth of lightly furrowed forehead. It revealed itself with the slightest twitch of his facial muscles as well as in the drooping line of his mouth. By some peculiarity of the blood, his complexion ran a yellow ivory, never varying its color under the stress of the strongest emotions. It required superhuman courage to meet the steady gaze of his eyes and lie to him. Though somewhat abrupt of manner and speech, there was something engaging about him, some subtle magic of personality that brought one under the thrall of his mind. Almost without the utterance of a syllable, he could bend weak natures to his will. Only the strongest persons were able to resist his domination.

He was one of those strange beings who live mostly within themselves, yet there were times when he felt a desolation of heart, a longing for companionship, for intimate association with his fellow beings. On such occasions, his life seemed to lack something of the beauty of other lives, as if it had been cast in a more somber shade. He could feel a wave of melancholy coming on him, and to avoid its depressing influence, he turned his mind resolutely to his work, feasting on the crime at hand as on some tempting dish. Without knowing why, the Missioner diamond robbery held for him a fascination more powerful than that called up by any other crime within his memory. He recognized surface indications of a deep cunning in the conception and execution of the theft. His experienced

eye saw that no ignorant or vulgar mind had engineered the substitution of those marvelous diamonds. The pursuit of the criminal fairly sparked with exciting possibilities, and Britz felt the thrill of the chase even before he started the pursuit.

Britz paced nervously up and down his room, revolving the incidents surrounding the discovery of the theft in his mind, but he was unable to pick a clew on which to work. Nor did the occurrences in which Donnelly and Carson participated furnish any promising material.

"I'll begin at the very bottom," he murmured, "and work gradually to the top." He sauntered out of the house, walking with the air of one trying to lengthen moments of reflection. In front of the Missioner home he stopped, surveying the massive stone walls, as if trying to figure the possibility of nocturnal intrusion. The front door was of heavy bronze and was swung open by the butler in response to the ringing of the bell.

"Is Mrs. Missioner at home?" asked Britz.

The butler eyed him suspiciously. "Who wishes to see her?" he asked. "Lieutenant Britz, of Headquarters."

After a long delay, he was ushered into the same room in which the incidents preceding Miss Holcomb's arrest had occurred.

"I have come to inquire more minutely into the disappearance of the jewels," he explained.

Mrs. Missioner's face showed lines of deep suffering. Heavy rings encircled her eyes, deep furrows scarred her forehead.

"I am more than anxious to supply you with all the information in my possession," she said. "It is meager enough, and I almost despair of ever seeing my jewels again."

"Madam, no case is hopeless," Britz soothed. "The immense value of the diamonds will make their recovery all the easier. I feel safe in surmising that none of them, or only a very few of them, have been disposed of as yet. Now, do you recall the last time you wore the collarette?"

"It was a week ago, at dinner in my home," she replied.

"And when before that?"

"About two weeks before, at a dance in the home of a friend."

"How long have you owned the collarette?"

"About ten years."

"It was a gift from your husband, I believe?" Britz asked.

"It was," the widow answered.

"Where was it purchased?"

"The Maharanees was bought in India. The other stones were gathered from time to time, and were strung together in the form of the collarette at Tiffany's."

"That was ten years ago?"

"It was."

"Since then, has the collarette been out of your possession at any time?"

"I recall only one instance," she replied.

"When was that?" he asked.

"About two years ago. I sent it to Tiffany's for resetting."

"The substitution was hardly made there," he smiled. "You are absolutely sure the collarette, with that one exception, has been in no one else's possession?"

"Absolutely sure," the widow answered.

"May I examine the safe?" he asked.

Through a magnifying glass he studied the steel door of the compartment, after which the widow set the combination and swung open the safe. The interior was as bare of suspicious marks as the exterior.

"Donnelly and Carson are right to this extent. It is an inside job," he pronounced.

"We must ascertain the day of the robbery as closely as possible," he said. "Two years ago is too remote a time on which to begin work. I understand that you called in Mr. Ransome the other night? Has any other expert seen the jewels in the last two years?"

"No other expert, but Mr. Ransome and I looked over the collection before I went abroad eighteen months ago. He saw the collarette at that time."

"Good!" flashed Britz. "Of course, he said nothing as to the jewels being paste?"

"Nothing," answered Mrs. Missioner.

"Then it is almost certain that the real jewels were in your safe then," pronounced Britz. "Since then, who has been with you when you wore the collarette?"

"Mr. Griswold and Mr. Sands were my escorts to the dinner two weeks ago. They and Miss March also were my guests at the opera."

"Now, please tell me exactly, who was in the room when you put the collarette on and when you took it off coming home two weeks ago?" Britz inquired.

"Miss Holcomb was in the room when I opened the combination of the safe. I believe the collarette lay on the table until I was fully dressed. Then Mr. Sands and Mr. Griswold arrived, and were shown into the room. I recall that I had difficulty in adjusting the clasp, and Mr. Griswold snapped it shut."

"Were you out of the room for even a moment while the collarette lay on the table?"

"No," Mrs. Missioner answered.

"Did you observe anything suspicious in the movements, actions, or con-

duct of Miss Holcomb that evening?"

"Nothing."

"What occurred after you came home? Who helped you to undress?"

"My maids were asleep," said Mrs. Missioner. "And I called Miss Holcomb, who occupies the room next to mine. She helped me take off the jewels and she saw me place them in the safe."

"And with the exception of yourself, Miss Holcomb is the only one who knew the combination of the safe?" Britz flashed.

"Only Miss Holcomb," responded the widow.

"On the night of the opera, who was with you when you put on the collarette?"

"Miss Holcomb, Mr. Griswold, Mr. Sands, and Miss March," the widow informed him.

"Did any of those present help you place it about your neck?"

"No. Mr. Sands had taken the collarette from the table, and was looking at it. I took it from him and fastened it myself."

"After you took the collarette from the safe on those two nights, did any servant enter the room?"

"The footman, of course, announced Mr. Griswold and Mr. Sands. I remember, too, that my East Indian servant brought my new dress."

"Do you believe Miss Holcomb is the thief?" suddenly fired Britz.

"I cannot believe her capable of it," she said.

"Then if we eliminate her," Britz retorted, "we must look for the thief among Mr. Sands, Mr. Griswold, the footman, and the East Indian servant. Miss March, of course, is out of the question."

"So are Mr. Sands and Mr. Griswold," came in positive tones from Mrs. Missioner.

Britz made no comment. His eyes moved restlessly about the room, falling finally in a steady gaze on the widow.

"How long has the footman been in your employ?" he asked.

"More than fifteen years," she responded promptly.

"And the other servant?"

"About a year. He came very highly recommended, and I do not see how he possibly could have substituted the paste necklace for the real one."

"Neither do I," agreed Britz. "Did either Mr. Sands or Mr. Griswold ever have opportunity to pass through Miss Holcomb's room?"

"Not that I am aware of," replied Mrs. Missioner.

Britz eyed the woman impressively. "We must bear in mind," he said, "that whoever stole the jewels must have been in possession of the real necklace long enough to have a duplicate made. Either that, or he must have been so familiar with every stone in the setting as to enable him to have duplicates made from description. The only reasonable supposition is that the duplicate was made directly from the original. It is barely possible, however, that some other means were employed."

"That is the most puzzling feature of the theft," said Mrs. Missioner.

"How long have you known Mr. Sands?" asked Britz.

"From girlhood."

"And Mr. Griswold?"

"About five years."

"Both saw the necklace on you frequently?"

"Very often."

After several thoughtful moments, Britz remarked:

"The only one who could have taken the necklace out of the safe without your knowledge was Miss Holcomb. One of the original diamonds was found in her room. It is absolutely clear to me that she is innocent."

"Do you really think so?" the widow asked eagerly.

"It is as certain as that someone stole the necklace," answered Britz.

"Then we must get her out of jail at once!" exclaimed the widow.

"We must do nothing of the kind," corrected the detective. "We must allow all suspicion to be directed toward her."

"But it is cruel, it is inhuman, to keep her in prison," protested Mrs. Missioner.

"It is necessary," assured Britz. "My dear madam, don't excite yourself. My blundering colleagues have done all the harm they can possibly do to Miss Holcomb. Far more important than the recovery of the necklace is the establishment of her innocence in the eyes of the world. With all the suspicious circumstances of this case woven about her, your mere belief in her innocence will not clear her. Therefore, you will have to leave this entire matter in my hands."

The widow bowed submissively. A shade of sorrow crept over her face as she contemplated the plight of her secretary.

"May I go to the jail and assure her of my belief in her?" she asked.

"That would be fatal," replied the detective.

"Then what can I do—I must do something for her," groaned Mrs. Missioner.

"The only thing we can do for her is to find the real thief," said Britz. "Kindly give me the addresses of Mr. Sands and Mr. Griswold."

He wrote the addresses of the two men on the back of a card and left. Britz headed straight for Headquarters and entered the office of the Chief. He threw himself wearily into a chair with the air of one vainly trying to discern a glimmer of light in the enshrouding darkness.

"It's going to be hard work," he said.

"I expected it would be when I put you on it," the Chief replied.

Britz recounted the information he had gathered from Mrs. Missioner and then walked into his own office. Summoning two subordinates, he directed them to go to the Missioner house and trail the footman and the East Indian servant. Two other men were assigned to shadow Sands and Griswold.

"That's all I can do to-day," he mur-

mured.

CHAPTER IX.

Word From Logan.

A week of agonized suspense in the Tomba seemed drawn into an eternity of suffering to Miss Holcomb. Conscious of her own innocence, she had, nevertheless, ceased to struggle against the relentless fate that marked her as its victim. Her sensitive nature recoiled from contact with the miserable creatures into whose midst she was suddenly thrust. No longer could she find solace in tears, for the long drain had exhausted the supply. The gloom of her surroundings penetrated the innermost sanctuary of her soul.

Doctor Fitch was in the reception room.

A groan, as of physical pain, came from Fitch as he beheld Miss Holcomb in the wan light that filtered through



No Longer Could She Find Solace in Tears.

the window. Her distress reacted on his sensibilities; he could utter no word of encouragement.

"It is awful," he moaned, as he led her into a corner of the room.

"And they all believe me guilty!" she asked despairingly.

"Not all," he returned, "there is one whose faith is unshaken. I talked with the lawyer to-day. He says they haven't sufficient evidence to convict, and that while the case looks ugly, there is nothing to fear. He is in favor of a speedy trial."

"Then even if I am set free my name will remain smirched," she declared.

"Your name will be cleared of all suspicion."

"It is so good to have you near me," she said. "I feel as if no harm could come to me."

They became vaguely conscious of a man's form outlined in the murky light of the room. As the figure gradually shaped itself to Fitch's eyes, his hand slipped from her waist and he rose to his feet.

"Lieutenant Britz!" he exclaimed.

The detective came out of the obscurity of the opposite wall, and, doffing his hat, respectfully addressed them:

"It is unusual, I know, for a police officer to ask information of a prisoner held for the Grand Jury. Before Miss Holcomb replies to the questions I am about to ask, I think it might be well for her to seek the advice of counsel."

"Miss Holcomb will answer any questions you may ask," Fitch replied. "She has nothing to hide."

The impenetrable face of the detective gave no insight to his thoughts. He drew a chair close to the expectant couple, shifting his gaze from Fitch to the face of the young woman. Though he gave no sign of it, he read the acute suffering she felt.

"Miss Holcomb," he began, "when were you last in Europe with Mrs. Missioner?"

"A little less than a year and a half ago," came the quick response.

"Was that before or after the East Indian servant entered the employ of Mrs. Missioner?"

"He was engaged after we came back."

"Did you meet Mr. Sands or Mr. Griswold abroad?"

"We met both of them in London and Paris."

"Did Mrs. Missioner have the collarette with her? I mean the one with the Maharanees diamond?"

"She did."

The detective settled back in his chair, his chin in his hands, as if lost in deep thought. The strange pallor of his face, shaded by the waning light, gave him the appearance of a dark clay image. Miss Holcomb looked inquiringly at him, seeking some explanation of his puzzling questions.

"The case is more baffling than ever," he said in response to her questioning look. "When I began my investigation, I was firmly convinced of your innocence."

"And now?" interrupted Dr. Fitch.

"I am seeking the light."

"Do you wish to ask Miss Holcomb any further questions?" Fitch asked.

"She is only too anxious to enlighten you."

The detective's eyes narrowed on the young woman.

"There is some information that I want, Miss Holcomb; I believe you can supply it." After brief reflection, he asked: "Mr. Sands and Mr. Griswold are frequent visitors at the house of Mrs. Missioner?"

"Both call very frequently," Miss Holcomb replied.

"And their visits are inspired by a feeling that is stronger than friendship?"

Miss Holcomb looked at Fitch as if in doubt what to say.

"He perfectly frank," he advised.

"I believe both have proposed marriage to her," he informed him.

"And Mrs. Missioner also prefers which one?"

"I don't know," came the prompt

response.

"You mean she has never indicated her preference to you? Come now, surely in a burst of confidence she dropped some hint as to her inclinations?"

It was plain to Britz that Miss Holcomb revolted against violating the intimate confidences of her employer. To reveal the secrets that had come to her through association with the woman who seemingly had turned her back on her now was so inconsistent with Miss Holcomb's entire character that Britz recognized the necessity of urging his question.

"I am not asking this out of any motive of idle curiosity," he said. "It is of vital importance I should be informed of Mrs. Missioner's relations with Mr. Sands and Mr. Griswold, as well as of the opportunity each had for obtaining the diamonds."

"I am sure neither of them would or could have taken them," Miss Holcomb said.

"That may be perfectly true," replied Britz. "I do not say either of them took the diamonds, but I must follow every line of inquiry that reveals itself to me. Now, isn't it a fact, Miss Holcomb, that Griswold was the preferred suitor?"

"I do not think so," she said in a low voice.

"You mean she preferred Sands?"

"Yes."

"Miss Holcomb, do you know the history of the Maharanees diamond?" he suddenly fired.

A quick spark of memory kindled her mind, and with the first flash, she understood the import of his question.

"Mrs. Missioner told me the history of the stone," she said. "I believe there was some scandal connected with its purchase in India. She told me that when her husband obtained it, there was some talk of it having been stolen from a temple and that the provincial native government tried to regain possession of it. Mr. Missioner succeeded, however, in retaining it as part of his collection."

"What opportunity did the Indian servant have of obtaining the necklace?"

"None at all," she answered hopelessly. "Unless he broke into the safe, and I believe that was not done."

"Mrs. Missioner informed me that on one occasion, when the necklace was lying on the table, the servant entered the room with a box. You were in the room at the time. Was he close enough to the table to touch the necklace?"

"I remember the incident very well," she replied. "I took the box from him at the door and he turned around and went downstairs. I do not believe he was within ten feet of the table at any time."

"I don't know what to think," Britz said, after some reflection. "Almost as soon as a new clew bobs up, it falls down and I have to begin all over again. I have no more questions to ask to-day."

Fitch accompanied the detective out of the prison, begging vainly for some word of encouragement. Britz answered his questions with monosyllables, as if he feared to commit himself with regard to the outcome of his investigation. Just before parting, however, Britz said:

"Every line that develops in this case, you can rest assured, will be followed to the end. So far, nothing has been discovered that changes the aspect of the case in the slightest degree."

The detective walked to Headquarters and entered the office of the Chief.

"Has Donnelly or Carson reported anything new?" he inquired.

"Nothing," answered the Chief. "And you?"

"Nothing that throws any light on the case."

"Britz," the Chief remarked, as though delivering some weighty conclusion, "I think you're working on the wrong hypothesis. You seem to have decided that Miss Holcomb is innocent. If you will survey the case as it stands, you will have to acknowledge that absolutely everything in it points to her guilt. I do not undertake to say what her motive was in stealing the jewels, unless it was simply the feminine lust for ornaments. I feel certain, also, that she was not alone in the crime. My belief is that she took the necklace out of the safe, turned it over to Dr. Fitch, or someone else, to have the duplicate made, and then returned the false jewels to the safe."

"But where were the paste gems made?" inquired Britz.

"That's for you to find out," snapped the Chief.

"I have personally visited every manufacturer of paste gems in this city and in Philadelphia, Boston, Buffalo, and Washington. My men have been to all the places in the smaller cities. Manufacturers in all the other cities of the country have been visited by the local police, and I feel absolutely sure that the duplicates were not made in this country. Logan is on the way to Paris now, and until we hear from him I don't think we are safe in venturing any opinion as to the identity of the thief. I am receiving daily reports of the movements of Sands, Griswold, the butler, and the Indian servant, but they show nothing."

"Why do you think Logan will discover anything? Has the real necklace ever been abroad?"

"Mrs. Missioner had it with her on the other side, but I don't know that it ever left her possession."

The Chief's lips curled into an amused smile.

"Kind of looks as if you're on the wrong scent," he baited.

"Wait till we hear from Paris," Britz returned.

As the detective left the office, he could not help a feeling of depression at the slow progress of events. As yet, the intricacies of the mystery were vaguely outlined in his mind. He saw them as a floating mist, heave with

possibilities but charged with delusive signs of beckoning trails that he instinctively knew led to nowhere. He was still treading lightly the maze of the case. One false step might be fatal, and he preferred to remain in a crouching attitude of watchfulness, ready to spring from cover at the proper moment.

Much as he deplored his enforced inactivity, he nevertheless had faith in the final outcome. A quick mental survey of the case convinced him that the first necessity was to find the maker of the paste stones. Whoever made the duplicate Maharanees would surely recall having done so. There were few European firms that could have made the stone. It was doubtful whether any American manufacturer could have turned out a substitute to